

Date: October 22, 2007
From: Mark VanOrden (DWS IT Director)
To: Bob Woolley and Dave Fletcher
Re: Technical Architecture Program Implementation

I spent some time this last weekend reviewing your document on technical architecture. Obviously, a lot of thought, time and effort went into the preparation of this document. It is very professionally written. We at DTS support the technical architecture program in principal. It makes sense, but we do have a few concerns. Below are some of my thoughts:

What do we like?

We believe it is important that there is collaboration between the agency IT shops so there is less duplication of effort and resources. We believe it is important to reuse and share solutions where possible. We support enterprise standardization where it makes sense and we are a firm supporter of enterprise integration.

Under the heading of Governance and Management you have the following sentence, “Governance is essentially about ensuring that business is conducted properly, and is less about overt control and strict adherence to rules: it is more about guidance and effective and equitable usage of resources to ensure sustainability of DTS and State strategic objectives.” This sentence makes a lot of sense and should be emphasized. Otherwise the agencies will be afraid that DTS is trying to dictate all of the rules and is less interested in the business. This goes along with the statement you made on page 27, “It is about leveraging the technology in such a way that IT services are effectively aligned with agency business needs.” These are the kind of statements that will better sell this to the business.

Rocking the Boat

According to Governing magazine – Utah is the nation’s leader in State information systems. This doesn’t mean that we cannot be even better and certainly be more efficient in the use of resources. However, in my opinion it doesn’t mean that we should do things just because they are deemed “best practices.” Sometimes we get so consumed with “best practices” that we don’t end up doing what is right for our customers.

Don’t take this as “push back”, because we do support the TA program if done in a way that is simple, quick and helps the business. Your document says it best on page 26, “TA needs to be firmly established as a business enabler and not as some other kind of bureaucratic blocking process.” I like the phrase “business enabler.” If we keep focused on this goal we should be fine. My concern is adding another level of bureaucracy that serves no real purpose other than to slow down the process. We already have enough bureaucracy.

Simplicity

You stated that one of the goals was that this would be, “Simple and easily understood.” However, it took a 29 page document to lay it all out. When presenting this to our business partners – I would produce a much simpler document that is no longer than 2 or 3 pages. It is important to get agency “buy in” and that will be more easily accomplished with a shorter, less technical document. It needs to be written with less technical terminology and in a way that resonates with agency leaders.

It seems to me that there are too many TA processes and that this part could be simplified. This is just my opinion. I am certainly no expert on the subject of TA. Nonetheless, 12 processes seem like a bit much and I have to believe that it could be condensed and simplified.

Ideas

First of all – I believe that there is a need for further collaboration and an understanding of all the business we do. Waiting for this to happen through the new TA review process could be reactive. Even in a TA review process as you have outlined, you will only be looking at a narrow part of the big picture. You will address the immediate need without necessarily addressing the bigger problem. It would make sense to me that before we implemented the TA review process that a committee is put together to evaluate exactly where we are at and make recommendations on how we can pick the low hanging fruit. You do reference this on page 15 where you state that Technology Improvement Teams should, “focus on specific business areas within the State agencies for process and automation improvement.” You also mention this as one of your goals. Goal number 8 is, “Develop a draft of existing business architecture.” I believe that this needs to be one of our initial goals so that we have a clearer understanding of the “as is” of how we do business today.

For example, there are many different agencies which deal with employers; e.g. DWS, Tax Commission, Labor, Industrial Commission, Commerce, Insurance, etc. How much of the business from these different agencies overlap and is duplicated? I happen to know there is quite a bit. We could better serve the Utah employer community by addressing some of this.

Challenges

Last year at this time I headed a committee to evaluate the possibility of selecting an enterprise reporting and BI tool. We faced numerous challenges and some push back from many agencies. We at DWS believed that an enterprise reporting tool and center of excellence made a lot of sense and took the risk to explore this. (We had the money and resources to proceed on our own.) We were never able to achieve our goal of an enterprise solution and the process in the end took much too much time to complete. In fact, had the date for the eREP implementation not been extended, we would have not been able to meet the deadlines for UAT testing.

The point that I am trying to make is that agencies will push back if the technical standards and solutions do not coincide with how they do business. It will be difficult to get agencies to move away from the technology they are currently using and familiar with. For example the SAFE project at DHS uses Power Builder. Is it the right product? I can't answer that, but I know that the business is happy with what they have and the cost to replace it would be high.

What is the cost of TA?

I don't see anywhere in your document where you estimate what the costs will be to get this off the ground and the ongoing costs from year to year. Also, you talk about being more efficient. However, this is not well defined. If we are going to save money, where will it be? Where will the efficiencies be?

Ultimate Goal

Under the TA Metrics section you talk about how success will be measured. The metrics listed are fine and the last one listed about case studies is absolutely necessary. But, the ultimate goal must be providing better and more efficient services to the citizens of Utah.